
Hermida Audio Zendrive, Zendrive 2 and Mosferatu Review

It's safe to say that Alfonso Hermida's pedals sit squarely in the epicenter of the boutique pedal world. Partly because of their sound, and partly due to an extensive waitlist, overdrives like the Zendrive have achieved impressive celebrity in the guitar world. Years after their release, they remain a popular topic on discussion boards and serve as handy signposts among players (have one on your board and you're in). And while boutique brands like Barber and Fulldrive certainly incite just as fierce of emotions among devotees, there remains a distinct mystique surrounding Hermida's overdrive stable, which includes the Zendrive; its bigger, tube-based brother, the Zendrive 2; and the higher-gain but chronologically older Mosferatu. It's an impressive streak of coolness, considering the mercurial nature of both the internet and the gearhead.

Perhaps the biggest surprise in the vast popularity of Hermida's pedals is the fact that these designs were originally created around a fairly narrow set of parameters. In a 2004 interview with the blog Six String Soul, Hermida recalled, "At the time I was developing the Mosferatu I was using a Fender Telecaster, Nashville Deluxe model with three pickups. I wanted a tone similar to Robben Ford's 'Golden Slumbers' version from a Beatles tribute album." A tall order to be sure, but you can measure Hermida's success in the oft-uttered descriptor, "Dumble-in-a-box."

Unfortunately my boss won't pay me for simply restating forum clichés, but I can confirm that the Dumble analogy is an apt one, if not somewhat oversimplified. The Zendrives and Mosferatu truly excel at producing the sounds players like Robben Ford and Larry Carlton are famous for, notably smoother-than-smooth, violin-like lead tones with plenty of sustain. They are also among the most sensitive, amp-like pedals I've had the pleasure of stomping on; to unlock the full potential of these pedals, you'll need to have a good handle on your guitar's volume knob and a willingness to play it. But that's about where the similarities end—each of these pedals offer their own take on a distinctive, iconic sound.



- 🔊 [Download Example 1](#) Zendrive with Gain at 1:00, Volume at 11:00, Tone at 2:00 and the Voice at 2:00.
- 🔊 [Download Example 2](#) Zendrive 2 with Gain at 2:00, Voice at 2:00, Tone at 3:00 and Volume at noon
- 🔊 [Download Example 3](#) Mosferatu in two parts, the first in a medium gain setting (all knobs at noon), and then played at a higher gain setting (Gain 3:00, Tone 1:00, Voice at 3:00, Volume at noon).
- 🔊 [Download Example 4](#) Zendrive 2 running into the original Zendrive for a stacked OD sound, with both boxes set at a medium gain (Gain approximately at noon on each).

All clips played through a Fender Telecaster Deluxe in the bridge position, sent into a modified Epiphone Valve Jr. with a 12" Eminence Red Fang speaker, and recorded with a Shure SM57 through a ProSonus Audiobox interface. Guitar by Randall Davis.

The Three Boxes of Zen

All three pedals share a similar face and layout, including Volume, Gain and Tone knobs, plus a fourth Voice knob responsible for shifting the midrange content of the signal. The original Zendrive, displaying the requisite yin-yang on a silver face, presents what could be called the most “balanced” tone of the trio. It’s at its best when used in low to medium gain applications, as it enters its sweet spot at around 10 o’clock and lasts until a little after noon. In this zone, everything from chords to single-note lines had more girth and depth, and when coupled with a tube amp teetering on the edge, it produced a natural, organic-sounding drive with plenty of harmonics and dynamic response. Pushing the gain higher produces similar results, although the pleasing roundness found in the Zendrive’s quieter moments had a tendency to get lost in the thickening din, while adding a bit of noise to the mix. If you want to push things to extremes with the Zendrive, keeping a hand on the Tone and Voice knobs should help retain your signal’s clarity and avoid any muddiness.

The Zendrive 2 builds on this base, but adds a 12AX7M into the mix. Tonally, the Zendrive 2 is similar to the original—think more violin, less crunch—but it differs significantly in feel. While all of Hermida’s pedals are responsive, this was perhaps the most amp-like of the three, adding a subtle but apparent amount of sag to the signal and imparting a warmer, “bluesier” vibe to proceedings. And while this reviewer has never been completely sold on pedals attempting to incorporate

tubes—they've always come across as somewhat fickle and not worth the trouble—the Zendrive 2 pulls it off impressively, imparting a beautiful roundness to everything flowing through it.

And even though the Zendrive 2 carries much of the same tonal signature as its younger sibling, it does include some opportunities for expansion. The 12AX7M is replaceable with other 9-pin preamp tubes, allowing you to tailor the pedal's response and behavior to your particular brand of noise. The Zendrive 2 also has a real affinity for boosted signals, adding a subtle depth to any overdrive placed before it; pairing it with the original Zendrive was something of a revelation, but the Zendrive 2 played well with whatever it was handed. Obviously what you get out of the Zendrive 2 depends on what you put in, but inventive players will find this pedal's warmth, amp-like response and genial disposition to be a great partner to their existing collection.

The Mosferatu, while technically appearing before the other two, can really be considered the deepest end of the Hermida Audio overdrive spectrum. Packed with more gain than the last two pedals, the Mosferatu moves between saturated tones more effortlessly and seems to have a broader range of possibilities hidden within. At its lowest settings, the Mosferatu demonstrates its loving ODS impersonation, aping the Zendrives' sweetest spots and producing marvelously round notes; moving the gain higher unlocks more plexi-driven sounds, more harmonics and a generally edgier sound. Cleaning up at all points remained a breeze, and while the Mosferatu trades in some of the Zendrive's tonal fidelity for increased saturation, my guitar's tonal foundation remained intact, even with the Gain and Volume knobs cranked carelessly to the right.

That all sounds good, so why not one of these pedals? A couple of demographics come to mind: if you're looking for more Gary Moore and less Eric Johnson, you might find yourself somewhat underwhelmed with the Zendrive (although the Mosferatu can get you close); likewise, none of these pedals really do clean boost, which may take it out of the running for some players. And while these pedals certainly have plenty of clarity and definition, you really couldn't call these pedals "transparent," in the sense that it's frequently used – while they add their own signature to the sound, they work *with* your gear, instead of smothering it.

And then there are the intangibles, the things that you'll only be able to decide upon after some playing time. These pedals act like instruments in their own right, reacting strongly to changes in volume and attack, not to mention various guitar and amp combinations. In playing these pedals through a range of setups, there were some generalizations to be had, but no real constants. The Zendrives seemed to play best with humbuckers (low-powered single coils weren't as inspirational), while the Mosferatu didn't have as big of a preference. I thought the pedals sounded better when played through 6V6s as opposed to EL34s. But all of those things are simply

matters of opinion and mean little until you've played them for yourself.

The Final Mojo

This trio of pedals from Hermida Audio are certainly deserving of all the kudos they get – you really won't find a smoother overdrive that expands your tone so effortlessly. They may not be for everyone – but if you've been toying with the idea of trading in that high-powered overdrive for something with a little more subtleties, the Zendrive, Zendrive 2 and Mosferatu are definitely worth the playing session.

Zendrive (\$199)

Buy if...

you want an incredibly smooth, round, low-to-medium gain overdrive.

Skip if...

you need more juice.

Rating...



Zendrive 2 (\$250)

Buy if...

you enjoy stacking overdrives and/or want one of the most amp-like pedals around.

Skip if...

you want a smooth but versatile overdrive that can cover.

Rating...



Mosferatu (\$199)

Buy if...

you want a smooth but versatile overdrive that can cover.

Skip if...

you're looking for a greater ratio of distortion to overdrive.

Rating...

